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RURAL CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH

An Abstract of the Papers and Discussions. For a Full Report see the Publications of the American Statistical Association.

In his paper on the Rural South, Dr. COULTER said that the agricultural changes of the South during the last fifty years were probably greater than had ever taken place anywhere in an equal period. Limiting his field to the eight states of the old South east of the Mississippi River, he pointed out that the population had doubled, whereas the land in farms had increased only 1.4 per cent, while the number of farms had increased fourfold, and their average size had fallen from 321 to 87 acres. However, the improved land in farms had continually increased, having risen from 33.5 per cent of the total area in 1860 to 49.4 per cent in 1910.

As to the value of farm property, including land, buildings, implements, machinery, and live stock, though there was a distinct falling off after 1860, being only about half in 1870 what it had been ten years before, yet by 1900 the recovery was complete, the figures for that year exceeding by only 4 per cent those for 1860. But during the decade from 1900 to 1910, the figures had more than doubled, and the ratio of increase was slightly larger than for the whole of the United States. What was true of farm property as a whole was equally true of each class of farm property.

The most significant change which has taken place is the breaking up of the large plantations of the old days into the small one-family farms of the present. This, however, has not come about so much through the wider distribution of farm ownership as through the growth of the tenancy system, which may not inaccurately be called a substitute for hired labor. "Just as it is true that tenancy is low and the proportion of farmers employing labor very high in Massachusetts, while the reverse is true in Mississippi, so, too, just as tenancy is comparatively low among the white farmers and high among the Negroes, the proportion of white farmers who employ labor is high, while the reverse is true of negro farmers."

Dr. FRISSELL said in discussing Dr. Coulter's paper, that while it was well to recognize the contribution of the plantation owner

to southern agriculture, we must not go so far as to deny that the tenant is oftentimes a real farmer, or to assume that all negro tenants are mere hired laborers receiving a share of the crop in lieu of fixed wages. There is a distinction between the "share cropper," who is but one stage removed from the hired hand, and the "renter," who is very much the same as a tenant farmer as he is known in other parts of the country.

Again, while the increase in the number of farm owners was greater among the whites than among the Negroes, yet the percentage of increase was greater among the Negroes.

E. C. BRANSON: Down South we know more about political than we do about economic reconstruction. Though it took the South forty years to get back the farm values of 1860, yet during the last ten years these have more than doubled, while during the same decade the southern cotton growers created more than a billion dollars more wealth than the output of all the gold and silver mines of the world. While there is room, as Dr. Coulter has shown, for twice as many farms as we now have, there are also opportunities commensurate with this room. The South, not the West, is the home of the corn plant. Tenancy is a drawback, creating an unstable population. The Negroes are sticking to the farms better than the whites, and the Negro is also rising out of tenancy into ownership.

The South needs to preserve a sane balance between country life and indoor industries. She needs improved highways, cross country trains, rural telephones, labor saving machinery, and new ideals and activities in her country schools and churches.

PROFESSOR GLASSON said that a part of the apparent increase in the value of farm property was probably due to the depreciation of the gold dollar. Again, the more rapid increase in the number of negro than of white farmers is probably in part due to the recruiting of the class of factory operatives in the southern mills from among the white families of the South. As to health, it appears that there is a lower percentage of hookworm infection among Negroes than among whites, though this may be due to greater immunity gained through longer contact with the disease.

DR. DUBOIS said that, in the face of all these facts showing the prosperity of the Negro, there were certain grave causes for disquietude, for the South is today committing nearly every economic heresy which the history of modern industrial development warns nations to avoid. The things modern industry has learned to insist upon are: (1) the personal freedom of the laborer; (2) the education of the masses; (3) the equality of employer and employee before the law; (4) the impartiality of the courts; and (5) the right of the governed to share in their own government. Not only is every one of these postulates being violated, particularly in the rural South, but on these violations there is being built a philosophy of industry and life which is self contradictory and fatal.